

**Healthy Bytes Article**

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**Benefits of Turmeric Spice**

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Turmeric is a bright yellow spice which has a long history of

medicinal uses throughout the Eastern world. Its distinctive color is a result of a component of the spice, curcumin,

which makes up only 2-5% of turmeric. Curcumin has been

studied extensively for its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant

benefits and may play a role in prevention of several of

today’s chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke and Alzheimer’s.

Turmeric powder, as it is most often found, is derived from the root of the turmeric plant, which is a close cousin to the ginger family. It is native to India and Southeast Asia and has been used in cooking for thousands of years. The roots of the plant, called rhizomes, are boiled and dried before being ground into powder. This powder was first used as a dye, but as it was found to have medicinal value, it has been used in Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine for 5,000 years.

Research into the health benefits of curcumin have demonstrated possible influences lowering or preventing inflammation and cellular damage. Some studies show that regular use of curcumin can inhibit the formation of cholesterol and triglycerides and reduce blood clot formation. These work to reduce the amount of plaque build-up in our arteries and improve blood flow, lowering risk for heart attack and stroke. Similarly, by lowering inflammation in our brain cells, curcumin may reduce or prevent the formation of fibroid plaques in the brain associated with Alzheimer’s and other dementia.

Cancer researchers have found that using curcumin topically at radiation treatment sites reduces skin irritation. Studies in laboratory animals have shown potential benefits for preventing or slowing tumor growth. Human studies are currently being conducted to determine if curcumin can help in the prevention of human cancers.

Although most may recognize turmeric as a component of curry powder, turmeric itself is not hot, but has a mild, peppery flavor. It can be used in both sweet and savory cuisine but is typically found in Indian, Moroccan and Thai dishes. Recommended daily use is one teaspoon of turmeric powder, or 1 inch chopped fresh turmeric root daily. A pinch of black pepper (1/8 tsp) has been found to increase the body’s ability to absorb curcumin.

Curcumin may help to absorb beta-carotene from yellow, orange and green foods. Try tossing turmeric in sweet potatoes, roasted vegetables, rice, sautéed greens, soup, stews or chili. Mix into hummus, yogurt or salad dressings. But pay attention to where you lay you spoon. The bright yellow color of curcumin in turmeric may stain countertops or clothing.